



**IST, School of Modeling
Simulation and Training**

Modeling & Simulation Doctoral Program Handbook

Version: Spring 2020

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1 Introduction

The purpose of the handbook is to provide general information about the policies and processes used in the program. The program catalogs provide the requirements for student degrees and are specific to a given admit term. The UCF Graduate Catalog is the University's official general record of graduate policies. In any case where this handbook appears to disagree with the Graduate Catalog, the Graduate Catalog is the final authority¹. The Graduate Catalog may be accessed via the UCF website at the URL provided below. The Modeling & Simulation's program catalog for a given degree and admit term can be found from the UCF Graduate Catalog page (see the link, below). While catalogs apply to the admit year, all students must adhere to the current handbook, which is updated periodically.

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

Sit down with a cup of coffee and read through this handbook! While it's not quite as exciting as a Marvel superhero movie, it's not so bad. You are, after all, a doctoral student—and reading a few dozen pages is not so hard.

In fact, we've worked to make the handbook a lot more readable! It's now organized according to the common questions that students have, and we've added diagrams to make some things clearer. Moreover, we've adopted a more conversational style to make the text more engaging. Important links and concepts are *repeated* where relevant, so they are more easily found when needed. Finally, for the most part the main sections of the document follow chronological sequences so that the pieces you need soonest come earliest.

We promise there will be no serious health consequences that will come of it! And if something important is missing then let us know, and we'll fix it for next year.

1.1 About Modeling & Simulation

The School of Modeling, Simulation, and Training houses a series of interdisciplinary graduate degree programs in modeling and simulation, designed primarily for students who wish to pursue careers in any number of fields, including academic units, government, defense, entertainment, technology, service, and manufacturing.

Simulation is used in almost every scientific and engineering field as a technique for exploration, modeling, and analysis. It is also used in training, management, and concept exploration to evaluate the behavior of humans, organizations, equipment, and systems. Because of the scale and

¹ The program catalog and handbook describe program-specific policies while the UCF Graduate Catalog provides general policies for all programs. Most likely any conflict between the two will relate to plan of study and timelines provided since that the handbook will reflect the latest catalog as of its approval date. In such cases, the Graduate Catalog is the correct document.

diversity of modeling and simulation's applications, practitioners have developed both generalized and specialized skills and bodies of knowledge.

Input from researchers and practitioners in government and industry has been instrumental in identifying key competencies for modeling and simulation professionals and has been critical to the development of the school's degree programs. The curriculum is designed to provide a broad perspective across people, processes, and technology relating to the developing simulation industry and an awareness of associated economic factors, particularly as it applies to improved training methods for high-skills, high-stakes jobs. Students therefore are equipped with an interdisciplinary core body of knowledge on modeling approaches, human factors, computing infrastructure, and visual representation. Students also have the opportunity to focus their study and research efforts to develop more specialized skills, working alongside faculty members with expertise in such subfields as behavioral cybersecurity, computer visualization, health-care simulation, human systems, interactive simulation and intelligent systems, simulation infrastructure, simulation management, and simulation modeling and analysis. Transdisciplinarity in communication, project work, and research is strongly emphasized within the programs.

1.2 Contact Information

The Modeling & Simulation programs are administered by faculty and staff within the School of Modeling, Simulation, & Training. The primary administration of the program falls under the responsibility of the *M&S Program Director*. The *M&S Program Coordinator* provides coordination services between students, faculty, and the university administration. Student questions related to university policies and requirements, as well as procedures such as the *UCF Plan of Study* are best directed to the program coordinator. Questions about advising or general information about the curriculum of the program are best directed to the program director.

You can find more information about how to contact these individuals at:

<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Contact.aspx>

The M&S program is a part of the College of Graduate Studies (CGS), so CGS faculty and staff can also help you with any questions or concerns.

College of Graduate Studies
Millican Hall, Room 230
407-823-2766
<https://graduate.ucf.edu>

2 How Do I Progress to My Degree?

To get an M&S doctoral degree, there are course requirements, milestones, and other administrative requirements. A description and the general purpose of these components is provided in this section, though the precise hourly requirements for each student are enumerated in the catalog of your admit year.

Below is a high-level abstract timeline diagram with admission and the key milestones highlighted.

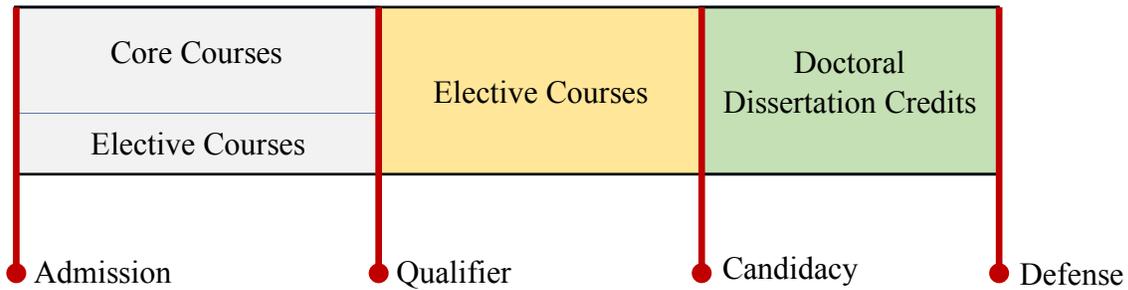


Figure 1. Abstract timeline with key milestones highlighted.

The milestones for the M&S doctoral degree are all designed to be a consistent experience and to build on one another. Each involves a written document, oral defense, and an assessment of these. For M&S, there are three milestones: the qualifying exam, the candidacy exam (which is also the dissertation proposal), and the dissertation defense. Below is a diagram summarizing the purpose or these experiences. The specific criteria and method by which these exams are evaluated are described in the program catalog for your admission year.

M&S Ph.D. Milestone Exams

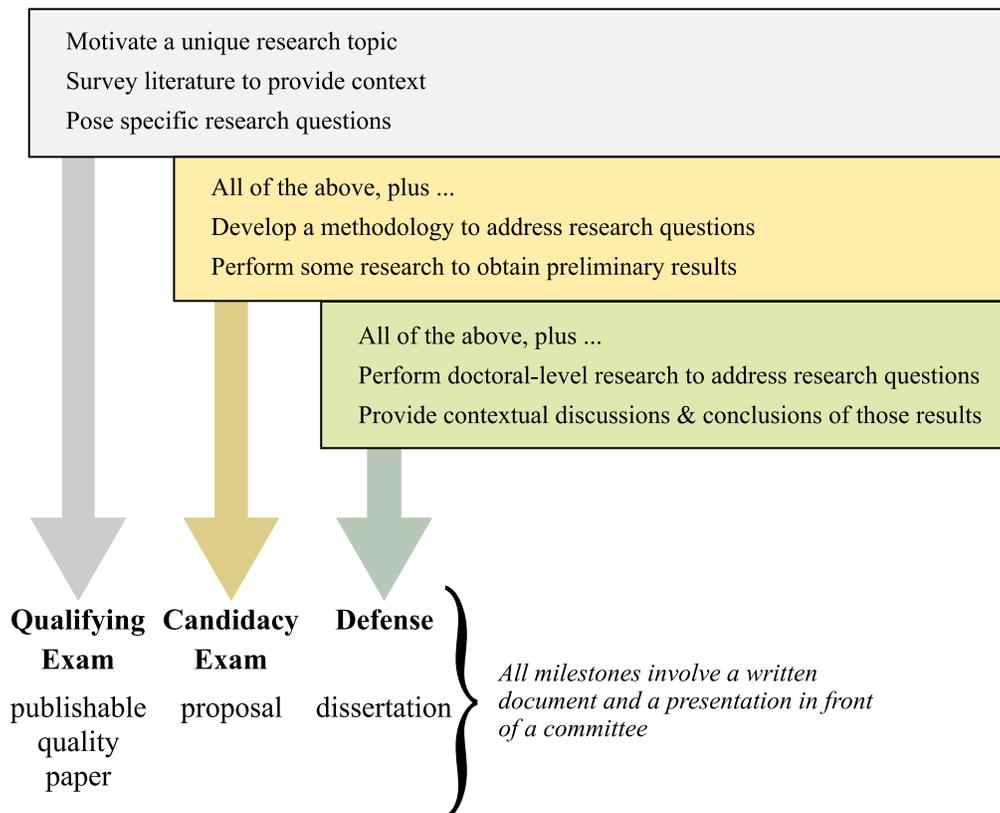


Figure 2. Diagram describing the basic purpose of each milestone. The specific criteria and method of evaluation for these are described in the program catalog for your specific admit year.

2.1 Completing and Updating a Plan of Study

Students are expected to complete UCF's *Plan of Study* (PoS) form before the end of their first year in the program; however, the M&S program encourages students to complete this obligation much sooner. The purpose of the PoS is to have the students plan out what courses they intend to take every semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer) over the years they intend to enroll so that all requirements are met and there are no surprises when attempting to graduate. It is an opportunity for the student to chart her or his course through the program in advance and make sure all degree requirements will be met. The university expects a Ph.D. degree to be completed in 21 semesters of enrollment. Requirements for Summer enrollment are outlined in the UCF graduate catalog. The form is available from the M&S website:

<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Forms.aspx>

Once the PoS is entered into UCF's systems, the systems function as an auditing service to make sure the student receives credit toward degree where credit is due. Moreover, the student can log into the *Graduate Plan of Study* online and see her or his progress toward degree.

<https://graduate.ucf.edu/graduate-plan-of-study/>

If circumstances change and your PoS needs to be revised, you may submit a revision. On the other hand, if you do not complete it before you've finished your first 18 credit hours, Graduate Studies will put a hold on your registration until you do. So, let's be very clear: There is not much advantage to waiting to submit since, even if plans change, you can always revise and submit a new PoS. If it helps, think about your first submission as the best *simulation* of your degree possible at the time of your submission!

We will encourage you to put together your PoS and submit it during orientation. If you are reading this, have been admitted to the program, and *still* have not submitted your plan of study, then please consider doing so right now!

2.2 UCF's Doctoral Annual Review

The University of Central Florida requires all doctoral students to be reviewed annually, typically during Spring term. The review is not a grade or an evaluation of overall performance, but rather it is an annual assessment of *progress*. The form is short and can be completed in a few minutes online. It asks the students to self-reflect on and assess their progress, then it is routed to the student's advisor to also reflect and assess progress. After that, the program director and college dean receive the form, and finally it is returned to the student to acknowledge that she or he has seen all observations made.

The objective of this form is to make sure students are progressing toward degree so that there are no surprises for students or the program. The student's degree is not contingent on receiving any particular assessment on the annual review. The goal is informational.

We encourage students to complete the form and route it to their advisors as soon as possible.

2.3 M&S Core Required Courses

The interdisciplinary nature of the school’s curriculum means that student preparation is varied. To meet this challenge, the curriculum is divided into three critical bands—*people*, *processes*, and *technology*—with individual courses aligned with one or, at most, two of these bands.

- **People:** Faculty members with doctoral degrees in education or psychology may be qualified to teach courses covering cognition, human factors, and human-computing interfaces that are particularly relevant in training methods that leverage modeling and simulation.
- **Processes:** Faculty members with doctoral degrees in computer science, mathematics, or industrial engineering may be qualified to teach courses covering the mathematics and research methods needed to construct models, conduct empirical research related to modeling and simulation, and analyze results.
- **Technology:** Faculty members with doctoral degrees in computer science or industrial engineering may be qualified to teach courses related to the building and use of modeling and simulation tools.

To ensure that all students have a base level of skill and knowledge within these three bands, there are five core required courses:

- IDS 6147—Perspectives on Modeling and Simulation, 3 Credit Hours
- COT 6571—Mathematical Foundations of Modeling and Simulation, 3 Credit Hours
- IDS 6267—Understanding Humans for Modeling and Simulation, 3 Credit Hours
- IDS 6145—Simulation Techniques, 3 Credit Hours
- IDS 6262—Research Design for Modeling and Simulation, 3 Credit Hours

Though different students will likely have different trajectories through the program, the M&S curriculum committee has drafted a prototypical sequence for students to consider (Figure 3).

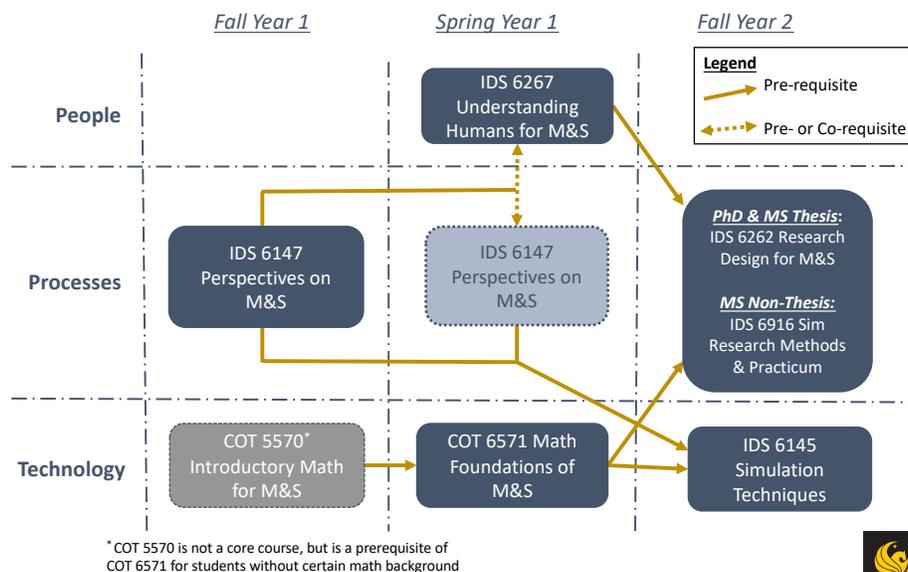


Figure 3. Diagram illustrating the relationship of core courses to one another as well as typical timelines for how you might take them.

2.4 M&S Restricted Electives

Students are also required to take a small number of electives from among program electives. The specific requirements depend on the catalog to which a given student is subject. The M&S program offers a wide variety of electives across all three of the bands discussed above. You can find a list of all M&S courses (core and elective) at the following URL:

<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Academics/Courses.aspx>

2.5 M&S Non-Restricted Electives

The remaining electives required for the degree are considered “non-restrictive elective”. These courses must reflect at least two disciplines that support the student’s area of graduate study; however, the M&S program does not restrict *which* programs the students choose.

A student must select a set of courses in order to design an appropriate plan of coursework. The purpose of the courses is to ensure that students have depth in a specialized research area as well as have breadth in the interdisciplinary area of modeling and simulation. The set of courses should also support a student’s area of graduate study and to meet the specific educational needs, goals and objectives of that student.

Non-restricted electives must consist of at least 9 credit hours of formal courses taken at UCF or from another graduate program if approved by the Program Director. Formal courses do not include independent study. The remaining credits may consist of additional coursework, directed research, independent study, and additional dissertation as advised appropriately by faculty adviser and/or program director.

2.6 Special Modules & UCF Required Training

In addition to coursework and program requirements, UCF requires students take several training modules. Completion of these is typically required *before* advancement to doctoral candidacy; however, we *strongly* suggest that students complete these as soon as possible. These include the following:

- The online collaborative institutional training initiative (CITI) for “Responsible Conduct of Research” (RCR); and
- Four face-to-face ethics RCR workshops; and
- The “Let’s Be Clear” computer-based course to help reduce instances of sexual assault and violence on campus.

For a complete list of requirements, please consult the UCF Graduate Catalog:

<http://catalog.ucf.edu/>

2.7 Masters Along the Way

In some cases, students in the UCF M&S doctoral program who do not already have a masters degree in M&S may be able to collect a “Masters Along the Way.” That is, students may count courses from their doctoral plan of study toward *one other* degree. Since the course requirements for the UCF M&S doctoral program within the first 30 hours and the M&S masters program heavily overlap, meeting all requirements for the masters degree can, in some cases, require little to no extra coursework. Talk to our program coordinator to see whether this is feasible for you.

Please note that UCF students *cannot* count a course toward more than two different degree programs—that is, there is “no triple dipping”.

2.8 The Doctoral Milestones

The M&S doctoral degree is structured with three milestone examinations that provide longitudinal assessment of each student’s progress toward the doctoral defense. All three are structured similarly: a written document and an oral presentation are required. The milestones are designed to scale in difficulty and scope as a means of: 1) Getting students used to the defense process; and 2) Allowing the program to make sure the student is ready for the next steps of her or his research. Figure 2 at the top of this section provides a high-level description of these, and we describe each in more detail in the subsections that follow.

Specific requirements may vary from year to year, so please consult the correct M&S Graduate Catalog (by admit year) for those. However, typically there are *two* forms associated with each. One is the official form the university and program need to progress the student (i.e., pass the exam, form the committee, etc.). The second is an internal program assessment form (discussed in more detail in Section 7.2). Please consult the M&S program coordinator *before* each milestone to make sure all requirements are met, and all forms are obtained.

2.8.1 The Qualifying Exam

The objective of the qualifier is to assess the ability of the student to pose a cogent high-level research question, motivate the need for that research topic, and provide a discussion of the literature needed to contextualize and motivate that topic. The committee is responsible for evaluating whether the student passes the exam. The overall goal is for M&S students who pass the qualifying exam be ready to undertake their doctoral proposal. Typically, this involves Qualifying Exam assessment form that also indicates whether the student passes. Consult your catalog for the specific procedure.

The student will have to form a committee, provide that committee with a document meeting the points described above, and defend that document to the committee. The student *is not evaluated* on the *scope* of the ideas—that is, the topic needn’t be “doctoral level research”. The student is also not evaluated on the method or results.

The M&S program leaves the choice of whether the qualifying exam oral defense is open to the public up to the major advisor for the student. We encourage advisors choosing to at least allow

other M&S students to attend since this promotes a better understanding of the process; however, it is not required.

Please consult your appropriate catalog for specific requirements.

2.8.2 Candidacy Exam / Doctoral Proposal

Within the M&S doctoral program, our candidacy exam and doctoral proposal process is the same. To pass the candidacy exam, students must form a committee, provide a doctoral proposal to that committee, defend the proposal orally to the committee, as well as meet all candidacy requirements by the university, college, and the program. The specific criteria and method of evaluation is described in the program catalog for your admission year; however, in general a committee is responsible for evaluating whether the student passes the exam. At minimum, this passing this will involve completing a “*Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Form*” from the College of Graduate Studies. Typically, there is also a Candidacy Assessment form. Consult your catalog for the specific procedure.

This form will be submitted up through whichever college the dissertation committee chair advises, typically the advisor’s own college. However, regardless the M&S program coordinator needs to receive a copy of the form for departmental records.

Given that Modeling & Simulation is interdisciplinary, the proposal should meet the standards of the field being studied as determined by the major advisor (a chair of the dissertation committee). However, generally high-quality dissertation proposals will provide a novel doctoral level research topic, motivate that topic, give relevant and timely literature context, describe a sound methodology for pursuing the research, and demonstrate some preliminary work.

The M&S program leaves the choice of whether the candidacy exam oral defense is open to the public up to the major advisor for the student. We encourage advisors choosing to make the proposal defense public since this promotes rigor as well as a better understanding of the process; however, it is not required.

Please consult your appropriate catalog for specific requirements.

2.8.3 Dissertation Defense

To receive a doctoral degree in Modeling & Simulation, students must complete a major work of novel, independent research. To pass the doctoral defense, students must provide their committee with a written doctoral dissertation document, as well as present an oral defense of the work. Again, specific criteria and method of evaluation is described in program catalog for your specific admit year. At minimum, passing this will involve completing the “*Dissertation Approval*” form from the College of Graduate Studies. Typically, there is also a Candidacy Assessment form. Consult your catalog for the specific procedure.

The doctoral dissertation should meet the style and standards of the university, as well as that of the field of study as determined by the major advisor (a chair of the dissertation committee).

Doctoral defense presentations *must* be open to the public and announced according to university policy. Consult the college guidelines for the specific requirements and restrictions of this policy and consult your appropriate program catalog for program-level requirements.

2.8.4 Watch the Calendar

Be careful of dates! First, a student must be enrolled in the semester that the she or he takes one of the milestone exams. Students who are seeking to take their qualifier have the most flexibility: assuming you have met all the conditions necessary, it can be done at any point in the semester. In general, one may not take two milestone exams in the *same* semester, though. The candidacy exam must be completed in a *different* semester. Since students cannot enroll in *Doctoral Dissertation* hours until after a passed candidacy exam is entered into UCF's system, if a student wants to enroll in such a class then it is necessary to take the candidacy exam with sufficient time to meet the College of Graduate Studies' timeline—generally at least two weeks prior to the start of the new term.

There are *many* schedule requirements for completing a dissertation. Students who are expecting to finish the dissertation defense and graduate should expect to have the defense well before the end of the semester. There is more about this in the sections below.

2.8.5 Waivers and Exceptions

All university and college procedures *must* be met in accordance with published policy. The program does permit students to request waivers or exceptions to certain program-level requirements. For example: Most M&S doctoral programs require that students sit for the qualifier and the candidacy in different semesters; however, in rare occasions an exception may be granted. To request such an exception, the student's major advisor will submit a written statement (email is acceptable) explaining the purpose and context of the exception to the program director at least two weeks before such an exception must be in place. The director will decide and provide a response within those two weeks and will notify the curriculum committee of the request and decision. The M&S program director has no authority to provide exceptions to university procedures.

It should be noted that Graduate Studies has a formal appeals process for actions and decisions that affect students, particularly as those pertain to decisions that affect a student's progress toward degree. The precise details are provided in UCF policy UCF-5.017 "Appeals of Graduate Program Action or Decisions", which can be found in the UCF Golden Rule Handbook. Students may also contact the M&S program coordinator to learn more about this or contact the College of Graduate Studies directly.

<https://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>

2.9 Doctoral Dissertation Credit Hours

Once a student passes candidacy and her or his “*Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Form*” has been approved by the relevant college, UCF requires doctoral candidates to stay continuously enrolled in a minimum of 3 credit hours of *Doctoral Dissertation* (XXX 7980) until they reach 15 total credit hours after which they must enroll in at least one credit hour per semester until graduation. This includes the Summer as discussed in Section 7.3. The expectation is that doctoral candidates are making steady progress toward the dissertation defense, and Doctoral Dissertation under the direction of one of the student’s advisors represents the coursework necessary to maintain this progress.

Which prefix is used for 7980 will depend on the dissertation chair’s departmental standards. Use the special registration form appropriate to the college the dissertation chair advises, as well as any other paperwork required by that college (e.g., course contract forms). Students may also use the combined M&S form. Regardless, a copy of all registration paperwork must be provided to the M&S program coordinator for departmental records.

<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Forms.aspx>

At minimum, all UCF Ph.D. students need to have at least 15 hours of 7980, and one cannot enroll in 7980 until one passes candidacy. UCF maintains policies for what constitutes “full-time status” once all course requirements are completed. For specific, please read the UCF Graduate Catalog.

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

2.10 Intent to Graduate

If you intend to graduate in a given semester, you must file an *Intent to Graduate* form through the M&S program to the college. For specific deadlines, please consult the UCF Graduate Catalog. If you do not file such a form, then you cannot graduate that semester. However, if you file the form, you may still decide *not* to graduate this semester. Consequently, you should file it even if you are not completely certain.

The M&S Program also *requires* students have a brief review meeting with the M&S Program Coordinator *before* an Intent to Graduate form is filed. This is to go over all steps needed to complete the degree.

The interdisciplinary nature of M&S provides creates some significant differences to other programs. One of these is the official college through which the student graduates: the dissertation chair advises the student which college to choose, typically the advisor’s own college. The graduating college is indicated at the time the student files for intent to graduate. Nevertheless, the M&S program coordinator must receive a copy of all paperwork for departmental records.

2.11 The Semester You Graduate, a Timeline

There is *a lot* to think about in your final semester! Hopefully your mind will primarily be focused on your dissertation. To make sure the bureaucracy does not take over too much of your attention, make a calendar for yourself ahead of time. Consider the following general template, then consult

the specific *UCF Academic Calendar* for the specific dates things are due for your graduating semester.

1. Consult the *M&S Program Coordinator*—Our coordinator will go over all the steps you will need to graduate to make sure nothing is forgotten.
2. File *Intent to Graduate*—Usually this is due the week *before* the semester starts.
3. Submit a draft dissertation for *Format Review*—You must submit a draft of your dissertation to UCF’s *Thesis and Dissertation Services* to be evaluated to make sure it meets the formatting standards for UCF dissertations. The deadline for this is early in the semester, usually about a *third* of the way into the term.
4. *Announce* your dissertation defense date—Doctoral dissertation defenses are public, and an announcement inviting the public to attend is required. There is a standard template for this announcement, and your version of the announcement must be submitted to the college so that it can be announced publicly. The due date for this depends on the college but it is usually *two weeks before* the defense. I
5. *Submit your dissertation* to your committee—It’s also typically best to get the dissertation document to the committee at least two weeks before your defense. Consult your advisor and committee for specific requirements.
6. The *Dissertation Defense* must be presented—This presentation should be sufficiently in advance of any UCF and program deadlines that the student has enough time to deal with unforeseen circumstances. We suggest *at least a week* before forms are due.
7. Submit your paperwork for *Dissertation Approval*—All documents and forms signed and submitted to the university. The deadline for this is usually about *one month before* the end of the semester.

Do the math here! Forms are due a month before the end of term, the defense should be at least a week before that, and the announcement and submission to your committee should be two weeks prior to that! Consequently, you need to be finished with your dissertation about *half way through* the semester. You can find out more detail at the follow page:

<https://sciences.ucf.edu/graduate/current-students/final-semester/>

3 How Do I Find Mentorship / Advising?

3.1 Different Types of Mentorship

Pursuing a doctoral degree is not an easy task. The best way to navigate the process is by building a healthy and diverse system of mentors. The canonical “mentor” in this situation is the dissertation chair; however, we encourage students to take a broader view of “mentorship”.

There are many sources of potential mentoring: faculty other than the dissertation chair, personal support such as family and friends, as well as fellow graduate students. Some people will be best to advise you about the course and degree requirements, some will be best to advise you about conducting doctoral level research, and some will be best to advise you about how to manage the pressure that can come with pursuing a rigorous advanced degree. These might be the same person, but they needn’t be. We encourage students to find mentors that address a wide array of needs.

It is reasonable to expect your academic advisor (typically your dissertation chair) to provide guidance about negotiating the dissertation process, including conducting that research. However, not all advisors will know the details of the program's specific course requirements, especially since M&S doctoral students can be advised by faculty outside our program (see below).

Moreover, not all advisors are equipped to provide emotional support that is sometimes needed for the degree. Please keep in mind that *you are not alone!* There are *dozens* of doctoral students in the M&S program, all with different experiences. Moreover, UCF has support services that can help with a variety of challenges. There's more information in Section 6 about services and groups available to help with this. Also, if you are always encouraged to come talk to the M&S program coordinator or program director if you have problems or need advice about the program.

3.2 Finding a Chair for Your Doctoral Committee

To maximize the interdisciplinarity of our program, we allow students to be advised by any faculty member at UCF who meets the requirements established by Graduate Studies. That is, M&S doctoral students can have a dissertation chair from another department on campus, as long as that faculty member is willing to advise the student. Students are encouraged to find a faculty member who has the appropriate expertise to provide the proper guidance for their specific doctoral research topic.

The M&S program does not assign advisors; however, you can schedule an appointment with either the program coordinator or the program director to discuss your research interests. Often some suggestions can be generated. So, while we expect each student to find her or his own advisor, the department can help by providing ideas and introductions. The UCF Graduate Catalog lists all graduate faculty and graduate faculty scholars at UCF, including those who can serve as dissertation chairs.

<http://catalog.ucf.edu/>

We encourage students to schedule brief meetings with potential faculty advisors. Go talk to them about your research interests and theirs to find the best match. Remember that you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. Of course, it is very important that the faculty member have the expertise in the area that you would like to study, but it is also important that you believe you can work well under her or his guidance. Things to consider other than expertise include:

- What kind of progress / work-flow expectations does this faculty member have of doctoral students?
- Does it look like this faculty has the time to provide the kind of guidance you believe you will need?
- Do you believe you will work well with this faculty member?
- What do *other* students being advised by this faculty member have to say?

3.3 Finding Members for Your Doctoral Committee

As with your advisor, the M&S program permits any faculty member who meets the requirements established by Graduate Studies to serve on an M&S doctoral dissertation committee. Per university requirement, there is a requirement for at least four members at least one of whom is “*external*”. The university interprets this to mean at least one member must be from another department; however, the M&S program provides a small additional restriction: Not all committee members can be from the last laboratory. Since the School of Modeling, Simulation, & Training is interdisciplinary, it is common for there to be multiple faculty with multiple appointments in a given lab. We believe the spirit of UCF’s rule is to ensure that the committee is not too insular. Additional clarifications and restrictions regarding dissertation committees can be found in the appropriate M&S program catalog.

The best committees are those that involve faculty with a diverse set of backgrounds that cover a variety of topics related to the student’s dissertation work. The student’s advisor is best equipped to help make these decisions.

There are two types of faculty that can serve on dissertation committees at UCF: *graduate faculty (GF)* and *graduate faculty scholars (GFS)*. The latter are meant to engage people external to the UCF core graduate faculty who nevertheless have salient and important expertise with which to evaluate a dissertation. You can find more information about these two classifications here:

<https://graduate.ucf.edu/graduate-guide/graduate-faculty-and-graduate-faculty-scholars>

There are restrictions as to how many GFS can serve on a given committee—for most cases this results in at most *one* such member. Consult the Graduate Catalog for the specific requirements.

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

Sometimes the advisor and student find that there is a particular subject matter expert external to UCF who may be ideal for the student’s committee but is not listed by Graduate Studies. Assuming the subject matter expert meets UCF’s requirements, there is a process to have the external person vetted and approved to serve on committees. First, an existing faculty member (typically your advisor) gets the curriculum vita and nominates the person for GFS status by sending the request and the vita to the program director. If the nominated person is approved by the M&S curriculum committee, then the director signs it and sends it to the College of Graduate Studies for approval. Once the college approves the nomination, the external person is entered into the system, and the subject matter expert can serve on UCF dissertation committees.

As with your advisor, contact potential committee members and try to go talk to them, if possible—not just to gauge their interest and availability in serving, but also to make sure you understand what their expectations are. Students should not expect the same level of involvement in their research from the members of their committee. Remember that most faculty have a handful of advisees but may be on dozens on committees. Your advisor can help you navigate these introductions and discussions.

3.4 Making Mid-Degree Committee Changes

While a student may wish to change her or his advisor at some point while pursuing the doctoral degree, you are advised that the later you do this the more disruptive it is. Before work on the proposal begins, changing advisors is relatively straightforward and informal: Discuss the change with both faculty members, and as long as there is mutual agreement among the three of you then you may proceed with the new advisor. If there is disagreement, the dispute should be mediated by the M&S Program Director. Make sure all existing commitments (e.g., GRA agreements) are honored as agreed upon prior to the decision to change.

A common reason for switching advisors is a change in dissertation topic. If the student has already started the proposal work, the student is at risk of losing some or all of the time and effort spent on the proposal. Still, such a change can be handled informally as described in the paragraph above (subject to any general and program-specific catalog requirements).

Once the student has advanced to candidacy, a change cannot be managed informally. The “*Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Form*” empanels the committee, and at that point the dissertation chair(s) and committee members are officially entered into UCF’s database systems as the committee of record. To change any part of this at this point will require a re-submission of this form. This will entail a number of people to sign off on the change, including the new advisor, the new committee members, and the program director.

Make sure the you understand the expectations of the new advisor. For a topic change, some advisors may require the student to defend a new proposal. Changes at this point can have a drastic effect on the student’s time line, and Graduate Studies does not consider such a change to be a sufficient reason for an exception to the 7-year rule.

3.5 Conflicts of Interest in Dissertation Committees

While it is relatively typical for student to be receiving funding from a grant via a faculty member who is serving as her or his chair or otherwise on a committee, the reverse is problematic. A conflict of interest arises when a committee member (including and especially the chair) is being compensated in some way by the student an organization for which the student is employed.

To mitigate such issues, we ask both the student and a dissertation chair to be aware of conflicts of interest and disclose potential CoIs when they are found. It is particularly important to give this matter serious thought whenever a “*Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Form*” is submitted.

4 How Do I Find Funding?

4.1 First-Year M&S GRAs

The M&S program has limited funding for a few 1-year graduate research assistantships. Such assistantships pay a small stipend for Fall, Spring, and Summer, and also typically provide a tuition waiver. They are intended for the first year only as a means of attracting particularly strong applicants, and they are competitively awarded to in-coming doctoral students. When such

students win such an assistantship, they are assigned to a faculty member and are expected to work with that faculty member on a project of some sort (typically a research project).

The expectation is that the student will work 20 hours per week, and that the student will disseminate the results of this work somehow. For example, by presenting a poster at the Spring SMST Day event or the Graduate Research Forum. Students who win such awards should consult their specific agreement for such details.

If that advisor/advisee relationship established by this first-year award proves fruitful for both parties, then the expectation is that the advisor will pick up the funding for that student for the remainder of the student's doctoral career. If the match is not a good match, the student is advised to start the process of finding a new advisor (and funding coverage) for the next year as early in that first year as possible.

4.2 M&S GTAs

The M&S program has limited funding for graduate teaching assistantships. These provide a stipend to the student for the semester in which she or he serves, as well as a tuition waiver. Students must apply for these. The application process is announced during Spring term for the GTAs serving courses in the next academic year, and decisions are typically made either that term or in early Summer.

To serve as a GTA for a class, the student must either have taken that class or the equivalent of it and performed well. GTAs must also complete the UCF GTA Workshop before work can begin on the class. The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) offers an optional Graduate Teaching Assistant Certificate Program. More information about GTA training and the GTA Certificate are available from the FCTL website:

<https://www.fctl.ucf.edu>

4.3 College and University Opportunities

The College of Graduate Studies and UCF in general offer several funding opportunities for students. These include:

Fellowships:

- UCF offers a number of fellows to help doctoral students, including the *Trustees Doctoral Fellowship* and the *Presidential Doctoral Fellowship*
- <https://graduate.ucf.edu/fellowships/>
- There are also a number of external fellowships offered by organizations such as the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program and the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship
 - <https://www.nsfgrfp.org/>
 - <https://www.fefonline.org/mdf.html>

Assistantships:

- The College of Graduate Studies provides access to a number of assistantship opportunities
- <https://graduate.ucf.edu/assistantships/>

4.4 Finding GRA Funding Working with a Principal Investigator

The overwhelming majority of students who receive an assistantship of some kind are funded by a particular faculty member who is a principal investigator (PI) on a funded grant. Though these are the most common, they also require the most legwork on the part of the student to find. Each lab and PI is different and has her or his own process for recruiting students.

There is an on-line service at UCF that try to connect students with prospective jobs (*Handshake*, <https://cse1.ucf.edu>); however, in our experience most faculty members do not post their GRA needs in that location. The student's best bet is to look for faculty members who have similar research interests, then try to arrange a discussion with that faculty member.

4.5 Tuition, Fees, and Expectations

Different assistantships have different expectations for student obligations, and they cover different things. Make sure you understand what is covered by yours and what your obligations are. The following are some questions students are advised to ask before accepting an assistantship assignment:

- Is tuition covered? Are the fees also covered? Note that some awards cover tuition but not the fees.
- Is my doctoral research considered part of the funded work, or is it separate to be done on my own time?
- What access to lab equipment, space, and/or resources will I have to conduct my doctoral work?
- If I publish a paper in a conference, will I be able to go and how will the trip be funded?

5 How Does the Program Communicate with Me?

5.1 Your Official UCF Knights Mail Email Address

We all have our preferred email accounts, but the official account UCF uses for communication is the student's Knight's mail address, <student>@knights.ucf.edu. There is zero sympathy from university administration for missing important messages because you do not check your Knight's mail. In some cases, failure to comply with an instruction from Graduate Studies can lead to a hold on registration for your classes, and those instructions will have been sent to your official school account. For example, the Ph.D. annual reviews are routed via your official student account. *You must regularly check your Knights email.*

Did we repeat that enough? Just in case and to be clear: *You must regularly check your Knights email.* It's annoying but necessary—take heart in the fact that you are not the only student who finds this frustrating.

The program will also use your Knight's email address for communication. Some faculty and resources may or may not allow you to configure another address for notification, but regardless this is not the expectation.

5.2 UCF M&S Student WebCourse

In Fall of 2019, the program will be putting together a persistent WebCourse for all students in the program. This will allow us to better publish deadlines and links to important forms, etc. All M&S students will be added to this WebCourse until they graduate or leave the program.

The WebCourse will also allow us to provide links to training programs students are required to undertake, such as those related to plagiarism, CITI training, etc.

5.3 Email Lists

There are also several distribution email lists that the program uses to announce important notices and events:

- MODSIM-ALL_STUDENTS@listserv.cc.ucf.edu
- MODSIM-PHD@listserv.cc.ucf.edu
- MODSIM-MS-GC@listserv.cc.ucf.edu

All students are added to the appropriate lists and should receive email. Let us know if you are not getting yours. Guess which email address we add to the list by default? Yep, your *Knight's* email address.

5.4 To Whom Do I Go With Questions?

The student's first lifeline for information is the M&S program coordinator. The program coordinator is aware of university policies, college requirements, and problem policies. They are also typically reasonably knowledgeable of M&S faculty research interests and activities.

For general advising and information about the doctoral program's curriculum, please consult the M&S program director.

For contact information, consult:

<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Contact.aspx>

Also, students can always reach out to the College of Graduate Studies directly with concerns or questions, particularly if these involve things such as administrative record changes, medical leaves, annual review processing, etc.

College of Graduate Studies
Millican Hall, Room 230
407-823-2766
<https://graduate.ucf.edu>

5.5 Social Media is Not an Official Method of Communication

There are Facebook Pages for the School of Modeling, Simulation, and Training; the M&S graduate programs; as well the Modeling & Simulation Knights student group. A variety of posts related to trending research topics and official activities of the school and the program are posted on these pages. These are great resources for distributing information. Just keep in mind that they are not official methods of communication, so be careful about *relying* on social media for information about the program.

6 What Kinds of Activities, Events, and Student Groups Are There?

There are many great advantages about being an interdisciplinary program! But one clear challenge is maintaining a community for information, support, and service in the face of such disparate research focuses. To address this challenge, the M&S program goes to great lengths to make community-building a deliberate priority. Students and faculty are encouraged to be involved in these activities.

6.1 Regular M&S Events

There are a number of regular events that occur throughout the academic year, both educational and celebrational in nature.

- **SMST Seminar Series:** Throughout the Fall and Spring semesters, experts are invited to the school to give seminar lectures on contemporary and extant research topics. All are invited and encouraged to participate.
- **Food for Thought:** Once a month during the Fall and Spring semesters, the M&S program gathers students and faculty to share a lunch. Typically, food is provided and prospective students, current students, alumni, and faculty are invited to attend. It is a great way to get to know other people in the M&S community.
- **Dissertation Proposals & Defenses:** Most dissertation proposals and *all* dissertation defense presentations are open to the public. Doctoral students are strongly encouraged to attend some of these. The process is a lot less intimidating after you've seen a few!
- **Graduate Celebration:** At the end of each term, the M&S program holds its own, smaller graduation celebration. Graduates are encouraged to invite friends and family. Existing students and faculty are also warmly invited to attend.
- **End-of-Term Socials:** At the end of each term, the M&S program holds an after-hours social where all are invited. It is a great way to get to know others in the community in an informal setting.
- **SMST Day:** Once a year, in the Spring, the School of Modeling, Simulation, & Training hosts a major event that combines student poster sessions with industry networking. Here, students and faculty interact directly with industry experts to increase awareness of one another's activities.

Stay tuned to our mail lists for up-coming activities!

6.2 Modeling and Simulation Knights (MaSK)

There is a student organization for the M&S graduate students: The *Modeling and Simulation Knights (MaSK)*. MaSK organizes its own events and provides support for students in the program. This includes shared space for students, as well as a library of textbooks that students might find useful. Learn more and get involved!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLH6jQXD6fE&feature=youtu.be>

6.3 University Organizations and Support Services

UCF provides a number of support services for its students. Information about these services can be found in the Graduate Catalog and on the UCF website. In addition to the library and computing services, the University offers various services that promote students' social, physical, psychological, and recreational well-being. Examples of programs offered by the University of Central Florida include:

- The *Student Health Center* provides medical services for the diagnosis and treatment of most illnesses and injuries.
- The *Recreation and Wellness Center* offers cardiovascular training equipment, weight circuits, free weights, a group aerobics room, outdoor pool, sand volleyball courts, a disc golf course, softball fields, and a variety of multipurpose fields.
- The *Office of Student Legal Services* provides qualified students with legal counseling and court representation in certain cases.
- The *UCF Dispute Resolution Services* provides mediation services to students to facilitate a workable solution that benefits all participants (e.g., roommates, couples, classmates, student-faculty, student-staff, and student co-workers).
- The *Student Academic Resource Center* provides students with resources related to succeeding at the University such as workshops concerning study skills.
- The *Office of Evening and Weekend Studies* provides students with services such as student advocacy and assistance, information on campus and community resources, university and community referrals, pre-enrollment assistance, and registration assistance.
- The *Barbara Ying Center* serves international students and scholars and provides a social, cultural and intellectual focus for many university and community activities. Additional services include immigration counseling, international admission processing, and general advice and assistance relevant to international students attending UCF.
- The *University Counseling and Testing Center* provides counseling (individual, group, and crisis), testing, and consultation services that are available to all UCF students.
- The *Multicultural Academic and Support Services* provides comprehensive and academic support, cultural enrichment, consultation, and referral services that promote the recruitment, admission, retention, and graduation of African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American students.

- The *Career Resource Center* offers comprehensive services geared to providing students with the skills, resources, and knowledge concerning establishment of careers after graduation. They also provide workshops on developing skills for job searches after graduation, including a workshop on resume development.
- The *Office of Student Financial Assistance* provides students with information and assistance pertaining to available scholarships, grants, loans, and other sources of financial assistance available through the University.

7 What Does the Program Expect of Me?

7.1 Student Rights and Responsibilities

UCF's Golden Rule is intended to address most questions a student may have about university rules and regulations. It also provides general guidance about a student's rights and responsibilities. The Golden Rule can be found online at the URL show below, as well as in the Graduate Catalog

<http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>

<http://www.graduate.ucf.edu/CurrentGradCatalog/>

In addition, students should consult the following:

- M&S Program Website: <http://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu>
- College of Graduate Studies Website: <https://graduate.ucf.edu/>

In general, the following pieces of advice regarding student responsibilities are always useful:

- 1) **Take responsibility for managing the business aspects of the degree:** Graduate students need to be independent and self-reliant. Expect lots of rules, forms, and deadlines that the department may have no influence over. Please do not expect your advisor, the program director, or the program coordinator to remind you of missed forms, unfilled requirements, errors in your record, etc.
- 2) **Take responsibility for keeping informed about changes and activities:** Graduate students are expected to check email daily. Moreover, they are expected to alert their advisor, program assistant, and program director when their email address changes. Many important program-related messages come through email—that's right, your *Knight's* email. Remember that this is a living university, and things change!
- 3) **Take responsibility for being familiar with UCF's policies:** Read the UCF Golden Rule, the Graduate Orientation materials, the Graduate Catalog, and the program catalog for your admit term.
- 4) **Take responsibility for your studies:**
 - a) Attend class and be fully prepared. If you have an emergency and need to miss class, contact your professor to discuss *prior* to missing class.
 - b) Treat professors, student colleagues, and staff members with respect and professionally
 - c) Students are expected to participate in research from the start of the program until graduation.

- d) Engage with your program and field-of-study communities. Attend activities, go to conferences representing your program and field-of-study, and find ways of serving your community. Participate in departmental, college, and university-wide research forums and competitions.

7.2 Regular Assessment of Progress and Performance

Let's be frank, there's *a lot* of assessment that goes on at many levels at a university. Doctoral students in particular are heavily evaluated. It can feel like you are constantly under a microscope!

Of course, the primary direct measurement of students during coursework is via course grades. In particular, graduate students are expected to maintain a grade point average (GPA) above 3.0, and they cannot receive more than two C's. After core and elective coursework is completed, doctoral research credit is graded on a "Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory" basis. Even the course milestones are primarily a pass/fail activity. Consult the Graduate Catalog for a detailed description of grade requirements for doctoral students.

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

As it turns out, a lot of other items that appear to be "judging" you are actually judging something else entirely. For instance, each milestone comes with a series of assessment measures regarding the student; however, though these assessment measures *do* measure student competencies in key areas, the *result and purpose* of these measures are not directly related to the student. We perform these measurements in order to measure how effectively the *program* is progressing students between milestones. The result does not affect the student at all, but it can affect the program by telling us when curriculum changes are working well or not. So, we're really judging ourselves, not you!

Additionally, doctoral students are required by Graduate Studies to go through an annual review each year (see Section 2.2). This has less to do with how good a student you are and more to do with having early indicators about problems with progress through the degree.

There are also opportunities for you to measure our performance! Do not forget that each term, near the end of the semester, you are asked to fill out the *Student Perception of Instruction* surveys for each class. *Fill them out!* They are taken very seriously by the university and instructors. Most instructors regularly make changes to classes based on these, and all professors are *required* to include them in cumulative performance evaluation and during the promotion process.

Also, once you have completed your degree, there is the *Graduate Graduating Student Survey*—the perfect opportunity for you can provide feedback about the program, the college, and university.

7.3 Enrollment, Attendance, and Continuity

Full-time graduate status is nine (9) credit hours during the Fall and Spring semesters and six (6) hours during the Summer semesters, until regular graduate course work is completed.

Doctoral students who have finished all of their coursework and have passed their candidacy exam are considered full-time for fellowship, employment, and tuition waiver purposes if they enroll in 3 hours of dissertation research (XXX 7980) for each term until degree requirements are completed. See Section 2.9 for more details. Note that once a student has begun work on her or his dissertation unless granted a Special Leave of Absence, she or he must remain continuously enrolled in dissertation course work for a minimum of three hours each semester—this *includes the Summer* term.

Requirements that need to be met for federal loan eligibility override graduate full-time requirements. A student may be held to other enrollment requirements, as defined by financial awards, veteran status, employment, or other outside agencies.

Failure to enroll in three consecutive semesters (Fall, Spring, Summer) is considered *non-continuous enrollment*.

Students are expected to maintain enrollment and to complete their graduate study expeditiously. A *Special Leave of Absence* should be requested when students will not be enrolled for three consecutive semesters or more. If students are not enrolled in the university for a period of three consecutive semesters (spring, summer, fall) and do not obtain Special Leave of Absence approval for such interruptions in their programs of study, they will be discontinued and must reapply for admission. Readmission is not guaranteed.

All (domestic and international) students taking thesis or dissertation hours are required to be continuously enrolled (including Summer) until the thesis or dissertation is completed.

Because of U.S. government regulations, international students must be enrolled every fall and spring semester. For students in this category, *Special Leave of Absence* is only available for documented medical reasons.

A student without an approved *Special Leave of Absence* who breaks continuous enrollment will lose the option of fulfilling the degree requirements originally listed in his/her official program of study already on file, and will instead fulfill the degree requirements listed in the Graduate Catalog in effect at the time the student resumes his/her attendance.

7.4 Academic Honesty, Ethics, and Conflicts of Interest

Students in the Modeling & Simulation doctoral program are expected to abide by the ethical standards of the discipline in which they are conducting research—typically the discipline of their dissertation chair. Additionally, students are expected to abide by the UCF *Student Conduct Code*.

Ethical conduct issues include responsibility to the public, conduct of research, dissemination of information, confidentiality, and academic honesty. All students conducting research involving human subjects are required to complete CITI Training *prior to* conducting research or working with participants.

Students are advised that it is wise to discuss and have agreements regarding roles, responsibilities and publication credit prior to engaging in collaborative research.

Any student suspected of violating the discipline's ethical principles, including treatment of research participants and any incidents of plagiarism, will be evaluated by the M&S Curriculum Committee. The M&S Curriculum Committee will evaluate and decide on any proposed remediation action as a consequence of ethical violations. In cases where student progress in the program will be substantively impacted by the proposed remediation, the committee will report the offense and proposed incident to the *Office of Student Conduct*.

Instructors may also report incidents of cheating in by students taking courses of record to the *Office of Student Conduct*.

<https://osc.sdes.ucf.edu/>

7.5 Handling Special Circumstances

We really hope your doctoral degree process is a straightforward one! But life and research happen, and things do not always go as intended. We'll talk more about some of the ways things can go wrong in the next section; however, it is important for students to communicate special circumstances with the program as well as to be proactive about making special requests of the program, college, and university.

We want you to be successful, and we want to support you in your endeavors, especially when circumstances are not ideal. The sooner you engage with the program regarding special circumstances, the easier it will be for us to help you. Often retroactively going back to address something that has already occurred is very difficult, sometimes it is not possible. It is the *student's* responsibility to engage program, college, and university processes in a timely fashion.

And when you do, we've got your back.

8 How Can Things Go Wrong, What Happens, and What Can I Do About It?

We put this section near the back because we didn't want to scare you. Are you still reading? Still have your coffee with you?

The bad news is that sometimes things go wrong and get in the way of your studies; however, the good news is that most of the time—with enough advance engagement and effort—there are ways of addressing these issues so that you can continue toward your doctorate when you are ready to do so. So rather than being overwhelmed by all the ways listed here for how things can go wrong in your path toward your doctoral degree, let's focus on how they can be addressed.

8.1 Incomplete Grades

The most straightforward solution to an urgent interruption that comes up in the middle of a semester is to request that your instructor give you an “*incomplete*”.

A grade of "I" (incomplete) is assigned by an instructor when a student is unable to complete a course due to extenuating circumstances, and when all requirements can clearly be completed in a short time following the close of regular classes. It is expected that the student is currently passing the class and the majority of the work is already completed. Please note that the instructor is *not required* to agree to the incomplete.

When an incomplete is assigned, a process is triggered that requires the instructor and student to reach an *agreement* as to how the course grade will be resolved. In this agreement, the instructor *must* describe the work that must be completed and include a timeline for completing that remaining work. The student acknowledges and accepts this plan.

Failure to complete course requirements by the planned date may, at the discretion of the instructor, result in the assignment of an "F" grade, or a "U" grade for thesis, dissertation, or research report hours. It is the student's responsibility to arrange with the instructor for the changing of the "I" grade.

The university has additional requirements that incomplete grades must be resolved within one calendar year or prior to graduation, whichever comes first. Incompletes in regular coursework left unresolved will be changed to "F" if not changed in the allowed time period. This time period may be sooner for those receiving financial assistance.

Sometimes students misread this policy to mean that they have a year to resolve an incomplete. We'll be clear here: You have *until the dates in the agreement to resolve the incomplete*, but it cannot exceed a year or graduation, regardless of what the agreement says. That is, if a student agrees to complete the work in the month following the close of the semester, then that is when the work must be completed.

Also note that, UCF fellowship students cannot receive fellowship funds while holding "incomplete" grades and have thirty days from the issuance of the incomplete to remedy it in order to continue to receive fellowship funds.

As stated above, incompletes are for *extenuating* circumstances. Students who are struggling to complete coursework should be aware that an incomplete can *compound* that problem by *adding* some of the previous semester's work to the current semester's work. So, it is in *everyone's* best interests (including yours) to resolve an incomplete as quickly as possible.

8.2 Withdrawal, Medical Withdrawal, and Special Leave of Absence

There are three processes at UCF that students often get confused. The details of these rules are in the Graduate Catalog, so we'll use this opportunity to clarify the differences between a *withdrawal* from a course, a *medical withdrawal*, and a *special leave of absence*.

Students may *withdraw* from a course before the *Withdrawal Deadline* for a given semester (before 60% through the term). When you withdraw from a class before the deadline, a grade of "W" is marked on your transcript, but the grade will not impact your GPA, and it is not considered an "Unsatisfactory" grade as discussed in the next section. You may want to discuss withdrawal with your instructor before committing to a decision since she or he may have a better appreciation for

how early work in the term compares with later work. You should definitely discuss it with the M&S program coordinator since she or he will be able to advance you about how your decision might affect financial aid or visa status, among other things.

If you withdraw prior to the *Drop Deadline* (typically at the end of the first week of classes), you can receive a full refund of tuition and fees.

If you must withdraw from a course *after* the withdrawal deadline, then things get complicated. If no other paperwork is provided the student will receive a “WP” (withdraw passing) or “WF” (withdraw failing) depending on the student’s grade in the course (including any uncompleted work). A “WF” *will* affect the student’s GPA and *is* considered an “unsatisfactory” grade. If at all possible, you should avoid this.

A medical withdrawal is considered if you are unable to complete the semester due to a serious medical condition (physical or psychological). You will have to provide documentation and file a petition for medical withdrawal. The details for this are described in the link provided below. If you file correctly and on-time, a tuition refund is possible. Typically, if a student withdraws for medical reasons, she or withdraws from *all* her or his classes. If approved, “WM” is marked on your transcript for those classes, and these will not affect your GPA nor be considered “unsatisfactory.”

<https://undergrad.ucf.edu/as/services/record-change/>

But none of these options will “stop the clock” on the 7-year rule (discussed below). They only help you manage the damage that significant circumstances can have on your academic performance. When significant challenges to your life will affect your progress toward degree you should consider a *Special Leave of Absence*.

Students with exceptional situations (e.g., illness, illness in the family, financial issues, etc.) may request a *Special Leave of Absence*. If approved, this will allow the student to remain unenrolled for up to six consecutive semesters without being dismissed for unenrollment purposes. Perhaps as importantly, the semesters for which the leave apply will not be counted toward the 7-year rule—that is, it “pauses the clock”, so to speak.

Keep in mind that these are not mutually exclusive ideas. *Special Leaves of Absence* do not protect your GPA, and withdrawals do not pause your clock. A student with a significant medical issue that crops up in the middle of a semester may wish to apply for a medical withdrawal from all classes in order to avoid the negative effects on her or his grade, and she or he may *also* decide to pursue a *Special Leave of Absence* for that (and possibly future) semester in order to properly deal with the medical issue without worrying about degree progress, for example. The two processes are independent of one another.

You can find out more about these notions in general from the Graduate Catalog. You can find out more about the effects on financial aid from here:

<https://finaid.ucf.edu/general-info/withdrawals/>

8.3 Unsatisfactory Academic Performance and Probation

Assuming you cannot address your circumstances proactively, as described above, they may affect your grades. It's good to know what the academic performance policies are so that you are not surprised.

A degree-seeking or non-degree graduate student may earn a *maximum total* of six semester hours of unsatisfactory grades. *Unsatisfactory grades* include all letter grades from C+ and below, as well as U and unresolved incompletes. Though the course in which a student has received these grades may be repeated to provide a better grade, both grades will be used in computing the GPA—there is no forgiveness policy on graduate grades. Exceeding six semester hours of unsatisfactory grades is reason for dismissal by the University and may be outside the control of the program.

Students whose GPAs drop below 3.0 will be put on *probation*. Students have nine credit hours (3 classes) to return to a 3.0 GPA or they can be dismissed from the program by the University. Moreover, students with lower than 3.0 GPA *cannot graduate*—you will have to bring the GPA back up, which may entail taking more classes than necessary. When students are placed on probation, they are required by UCF to bring their GPA back to a 3.0 (or higher) after 9 credit hours. If more than 9 hours is required, program *may* work with the student to formally prepare a work with the student to create a “*Conditional Retention Plan*” (CRP). The program is not obligated to do this, however. More details about this can be found in the Graduate Catalog.

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

8.4 Dismissal & Discontinuation

There are basically four ways a student may be removed from the program:

- Remaining unenrolled for three consecutive semesters will cause the student to be *discontinued* by UCF;
- Sustained unsatisfactory academic progress will cause the student to be *dismissed* by the program or the college;
- Academic integrity, ethics, or conduct violations will cause the student to be *dismissed* by the university;
- Failures on milestone examinations can result in the student being *dismissed* by the program.

Though Ron, Harry, and Hermione worried frequently that they might be suddenly ejected from Hogwarts, dismissal from a doctoral program at UCF will almost never come as a surprise.

Dismissals involving unsatisfactory academic progress will follow the process described in the subsection above.

Dismissals involving academic integrity will involve reviews at several levels. First, typically the M&S program office will be involved. Second, the M&S program is committed to ensuring that any case in which dismissal is a potential outcome be referred to the *Office of Student Conduct* (OSC). OSC hears *any* concerns related to a Golden Rule violation. This will mean there will be an opportunity for review at the university level, as well.

<https://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>

In addition, students are expected to behave according to the UCF Student Conduct Code, as well as by the ethical principles for their specific discipline. Professional behavior concerns will also be referred to the M&S program office and follow the same process outlined in the Golden Rule for academic integrity concerns. This process can lead to a variety of consequences, including dismissal when warranted. We expect students and faculty to behave in ways that foster respect for one another. Conduct expectations of our program are well described by the American Psychological Association and the Association for Computing Machinery ethics codes, which include but are not limited to responsibility the public, conduct of research, appropriate dissemination of information, and confidentiality.

<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>

<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>

For different catalog admit years there are different rules regarding the qualifying and candidacy exams, so each student should consult her or his specific catalog by admit term; however, there is almost always a process by which a student can make a second attempt at a failed milestone. The university Graduate Catalog stipulates that there is typically one chance to successfully defend a dissertation proposal; however, if the advisor requests it and the program director approves then a second attempt is possible. Moreover, one of the advisor's responsibilities is to do everything possible to make sure the student is ready to defend.

In all of these cases, the university, college, and program will communicate with you well in advance of dismissal. The M&S program follows the UCF Graduate Catalog regarding dismissal policies. Note that, while students will not be dismissed based on any particular result of a doctoral annual review, the annual reviews do serve to document academic progress and can be used (by the student or the university) during a grievance review.

<https://graduate.ucf.edu/>

8.5 Readmission Policies

In the worst case, your interruption has cost you over a year. UCF will automatically *discontinue* a student if that student has failed to enroll for three consecutive semesters. Students discontinued in this way may re-apply if they choose; however, students dismissed for reasons like academic progress or golden rule violations may *not* re-apply.

To file for readmission, students must submit a *new application*. This will include an application fee, and the student will be required to update her or his residency information and health history (if applicable). Students should apply for readmission if they were previously admitted and enrolled in the M&S graduate program but have been absent for three major semesters. These applications will be vetted by the M&S *Admissions & Standards Committee* along with any other application, and admission is not guaranteed.

If something interrupts your studies that may last more than a year, then your best bet is to avoid falling out of enrollment for three consecutive semesters using one of the methods discussed in Section 8.2 above. *Do not wait!*

For more information on readmission, please visit the Graduate Students website.

<https://graduate.ucf.edu/>

8.6 Petitions and Grievances

Students can petition for a variety of reasons, some specified in the Golden Rule (e.g., a grade or program action) and others that relate to graduate policy.

<https://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>

The UCF Modeling & Simulation program seeks to provide a comfortable, positive, and safe learning and working environment for students, faculty, and staff. UCF does not tolerate any discrimination or harassment based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious preferences, disability, or age. Interactions between and among students, faculty and/or staff are expected to occur in a professional, responsible, and ethical.

Conflicts between students or between students, faculty and/or staff occur for a variety of reasons, in spite of our efforts to these standards. Students and faculty are encouraged to resolve these conflicts quickly and in a responsible manner.

However, several options are available to students who believe that a conflict cannot be resolved through discussion with involved students, faculty, or staff. UCF *Graduate Studies* allows for petitions of university requirements and their academic matters. Academic matters are those involving instruction, research, or decisions involving instruction or affecting academic freedom.

The academic grievance procedure is designed to provide a fair means of dealing with graduate student complaints regarding a specific action or decision by a faculty member, program or college, including termination from an academic program. Academic misconduct complaints associated with sponsored research will invoke procedures outlined by the UCF *Office of Research*.

Students who believe they have been treated unfairly may initiate a grievance. The procedure provides several levels of review, and at each level of review the participants are further removed and have a broader outlook than where the grievance originated. Procedures for initiating an academic grievance can be found at The Golden Rule.

<https://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>

8.7 The Dreaded Seven-Year Rule

UCF permits students to take up to seven years to complete a graduate degree from the time of admission to a specific program. At the end of seven years, a student who has not completed her or his degree will no longer be permitted to enroll in courses and will be dismissed from that program. This is true whether the student is a part-time student or a full-time student.

Sooner than that, each student will be required to file a *Completion Plan* at the end of her or his fifth year if the degree hasn't been completed yet. This plan will provide a roadmap for completing before seven years. If a student anticipates problems completing in time, a petition should be filed at or before this fifth year.

This all sounds scary, but it really shouldn't be too frightening. Student progress is evaluated annual, and the student is an integral part of that process. Your advisor should also be providing you with consistent feedback, as well. Finally, the university and the program will communicate with you regrading making sure you have sufficient time to complete. If you keep up with your *Graduate Plan of Study*, revising it when necessary so that you always have a solid plan for how you will complete on time, you should have no troubles.

If you run into problems, note that (as discussed above), a *Special Leave of Absence* will pause the 7-year clock. It is far better for you to think and plan proactively than to wait until your fifth or sixth year to note that you will have difficulty finishing your degree within the time frame, particularly when problems arise during your doctoral studies that delay your work.

Working out the math and the planning early is *especially* important for part-time students. At three hours per semester, it is possible to finish a Ph.D. if you already have 30 hours transferred in from some other degree (e.g., an earned masters degree). However, even if you take a class in the Summer, three credit hours per term for seven years comes to 63 credit hours, and you need 72 credit hours to complete a doctoral degree if you have no other credits to transfer in. Moreover, sequence constraints for when classes are offered and milestones can be completed may also delay completion. So stay on top of your *Graduate Plan of Study*!

9 Wow, What Are All These Forms?

Universities, colleges, and programs love their forms! There's *a lot* of them at UCF. It's easy to lose track and easy to forget. Getting a degree is a complicated business, and ensuring the process is fair, ethical, and efficient unfortunately leads to some bureaucracy.

The main cudgel the university has for ensuring you complete the forms you are supposed to complete in most cases is to put a *hold* on your registration. That typically sends students to us (the program office) trying to figure out how to remove the hold. It's stressful for you and stressful for us. Instead, it's typically best not to let it get that far.

How can you be sure you've done all the necessary paperwork? There are three sure-fire ways to make sure you are on top of things:

- 1) *Check your Knight's Email!* How do you know you have to fill out some form? UCF will *tell* you to do it—many, many times. “I don't ever read my Knight's mail,” will not stop Graduate Studies from holding your registration (or worse).
- 2) *Read the catalogs!* Most of the standard paperwork that must be completed is outlined in the Graduate Catalog or the specific program catalog for your admit year. Heck, some of it is discussed in this handbook!

<http://www.graduatecatalog.ucf.edu/>

- 3) *Ask the M&S program coordinator!* Still uncertain or nervous? Ask the program coordinator what forms are needed for a given task.
<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Contact.aspx>
- 4) *Consult our website!* A lot (though not all) of the common forms you will need for different tasks within your doctoral degree process can be found on our website:
<https://msgrad.ist.ucf.edu/Forms.aspx>

In short, the paperwork can be managed by being prepared and staying in communication with the program, college, and university. A graduate education is a challenging and rewarding experience! Stay on top of the red tape so it is not an unnecessary source of stress.

Forms doctoral students must commonly submit include:

- **During your First Year**
 - Graduate Plan of Study
- **Each Semester for Each Course**
 - Student Perception of Instruction
- **Each Year**
 - Doctoral Annual Review
- **For the Qualifying Exam**
 - Qualifying Exam Assessment Form
- **For the Candidacy Exam**
 - Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Status Form
 - Candidacy Exam Assessment Form
- **Taking Doctoral Research credit (XXX7919)**
 - Special Registration Form
 - Course Contract Form
- **Taking Doctoral Dissertation credit (XXX7980)**
 - Special Registration Form
 - Course Contract Forms
- **During your Graduating Semester**
 - Intent to Graduate Form
 - Defense Announcement Template
 - Doctoral Approval Form
 - Dissertation Assessment Form
- **After you Graduate**
 - The Graduating Graduate Student Survey

Always remember that the most important paperwork throughout your doctoral degree process is UCF's to complete: your diploma!